

What is claimed is:

1. A method of encoding a video signal representing a sequence of pictures, the method comprising receiving a current picture for encoding,
5 forming a temporal prediction of the current picture from a default reference picture for the current picture, comparing the default reference picture with at least one further reference picture, calculating a measure of the similarity between the default reference picture and each further reference picture and, if the measure of similarity meets a pre-determined criterion, outputting an
10 indicator identifying the further reference picture.
2. A method according to claim 1 further comprising forming a temporal prediction of the current picture from a first default reference picture and a second default reference picture for the current picture, said first default
15 reference picture occurring temporally before the current picture and said second default reference picture occurring temporally after the current picture, comparing the first default reference picture with at least one further reference picture occurring temporally before the current picture, calculating a measure of the similarity between the first default reference picture and each further
20 reference picture and, if the measure of similarity meets a pre-determined criterion, outputting an indicator identifying the further reference picture.
3. A method according to claim 1 or 2 further comprising comparing the default reference picture with a plurality of further reference pictures and
25 outputting an indicator for each further reference picture that meets the predetermined criterion.
4. A method according to claim 3 further comprising ranking the further reference pictures that meet the predetermined criterion and associating the
30 indicator with the temporal prediction of the current frame in order of rank, the further reference picture having the closest similarity to the default reference picture being placed first.

5. A method according to any preceding claim wherein the indicator is included in a picture header.

6. A method according to any preceding claim wherein the video signal is encoded according to the H.263 video compression standard and the indicator is included in the Supplemental Enhancement Information.

7. A method according to any preceding claim wherein the comparison is carried out for portions of a picture at a time.

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8. A method of encoding a video signal representing a sequence of pictures, the method comprising receiving a current picture for encoding, forming a prediction of at least part of the current picture from a default reference picture for the current picture, comparing the part of the default reference picture or the current picture with a corresponding part of at least one further picture of the sequence to form a measure of similarity and, if the measure of similarity meets a pre-determined criterion, outputting an indicator in respect of the part of the current frame identifying the further picture of the sequence.

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9. A method of decoding an encoded video signal representing a sequence of pictures, the encoded signal including pictures that have been encoded by forming a temporal prediction of a current picture from a default reference picture for the current picture, the method comprising receiving an encoded video signal representing a current picture and decoding at least the picture header of the current picture wherein, when the decoder is unable to decode the default reference picture of the current picture, examining an indicator identifying a further reference picture and decoding the current picture with reference to said further reference picture if such an indicator is associated with the current picture.

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10. A video encoder comprising an input for receiving a video signal representing a sequence of pictures, an input for receiving a current picture for encoding, a predictive coder for forming a temporal prediction of the current picture from a default reference picture for the current picture, a
5 comparator for comparing the default reference picture or the current picture with at least one further reference picture and calculating a measure of the similarity and, when the measure of similarity meets a pre-determined criterion, outputting an indicator identifying the further reference picture.
- 10 11. A video decoder comprising an input for receiving an encoded video signal representing a sequence of pictures, the encoded signal including pictures that have been encoded by forming a temporal prediction of a current picture from a default reference picture for the current picture, the decoder comprising an input for receiving an encoded video signal representing a
15 current picture and a processor for decoding at least the picture header of the current picture wherein, when the decoder is unable to decode the default reference picture of the current picture, the decoder is arranged to examine an indicator identifying a further reference picture and to decode the current picture with reference to said further reference picture if such an indicator is
20 associated with the current picture.
12. A radio telecommunications device including an encoder according to claim 10 and/or a decoder according to claim 11.